

OBSERVATIONS

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/ ON THE

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Importance and Use

OF

THEATRES,

THEIR

Present REGULATION, and possible
IMPROVEMENTS.

L O N D O N :

Printed for M. COOPER, in Paternoster-row.
And J. JACKSON, in St. James's-Street.

M.DCC.LIX.

(Price One Shilling.)

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Practical Regulation, and possible
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LONDON:

Printed for M. Cooper, in Pall-mall-tow.
And J. Jackson, in St. James's Street.

MDCCLXX.

(Price One Shilling)

much knowledge, sense, and candour
from for young a person: and who
when he attains to such a perfect
high rank, rejoiced in such a prospect
The delicacy of sentiment, and
the rectitude of nature, which
which your grace then express
written expressly in their cause, will
not be denied your patronage:
he is happy, and an
example of virtue to our
THE
DEDICATION.

To his Grace the Duke of
MARLBOROUGH.

My Lord Duke,

YOUR grace my remember, some
months since, a stranger had
the honour to be in the same box
with you at *Covent-Garden* theatre;
and that you were pleased (with
that politeness, which is the great
ornament of dignity) to enter into
conversation with him. 'Tis he who
dedicates this treatise to your most
respected name: who at that time,
without knowing your quality, was
charmed and astonished to hear so
much

much knowledge, sense, and candour from so young a person: and who when he afterwards understood your high rank, rejoiced in such a prospect for his country.

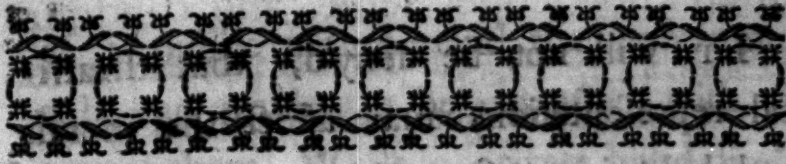
The delicacy of sentiment, and the regard for virtue and for decency, which your grace then expressed, persuaded him that this pamphlet, written expressly in their cause, will not be deny'd your patronage: he is happy that in selecting an example of virtue to oppose against the force of fashionable folly, it was impossible to fix any where so justly as on a lady allied to your grace's most distinguished family: and has the honour to be, with the greatest deference and respect,

My Lord Duke,

Your Grace's most humble,

and most obedient Servant,

The AUTHOR.



(3)

OF OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
THEATRE.

THE least things when they
may be useful, gain impor-
tance. 'Tis in this light I
consider the *English* theatre
in its present condition : and as the atten-
tion which is shewn to its representations,
proves the stage may be serviceable to the
morals, and to the general interest of the
people, I persuade myself, I may be ex-
cused for treating so light a subject seri-
ously ; and addressing these thoughts, to
more than the common audiences,

It

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It will not be deny'd, that theatrical representations may affect the morals and behaviour of mankind : and whether this shall be to their advantage, or to their disgrace, depends entirely on the conduct of them. They will be capable of the greatest good, where they are most frequented ; but there may also arise ill from them, in the same proportion. This is a reason, why a serious regard should be paid to them at present. Till of late, so few frequented the theatres, that the influence, whether good or bad, could not be extensive : but 'tis now the general amusement of the public ; and what good or ill impressions are received, will be universal. On the virtues, and manners of a people, depends the prosperity of a state : these will be influenced by the theatres ; the concern is therefore

of

of a public nature ; and the government only can prudently be entrusted with the care of them. While a private hand directs the influence of this important article, the prosperity, the glory, nay, perhaps, the existence of the state, are capable of mischief, from too frivolous a cause. The folly, or the avarice, of some one mean person, may threaten the general welfare ; and by mismanagement, or design, turn remedies to poison.

THE generality of men, receive more easily, and retain more firmly what they hear, than what they read. The history of our kings, is more known from *Shakespeare*, than *Rapin* ; and *Cato* has taught more stubborn virtue, than all the other lessons of morality.

FALSHOOD and vice may be taught as easily ; and they will be retained as firmly

ly in the memory. Young people receive almost their first impressions from the stage: what is said there, is expressed elegantly, and delivered forcibly; it commands the attention, because it attracts the imagination; and what has been felt, when spoken, will be long remembered.

BUT there is something more: people go thither not only to see the play, but to see one another, and even this demands some regulation. To shew, Mrs. Spencer covered with jewels, yet more adorn'd with modesty; is to say before a thousand young and docile minds; see the reward and consequence of virtue! But, on the other hand, to place the fashionable prostitute, with equal glare, in the same point of view; is to say to the same hearers, (while she rolls about her drunken eyes in wantonness) "*Who would be honest,*
when

when this comes from prostitution? Who would be an humble wife, when this is the condition of the mistress?

A theatre, therefore may be of double service, or of equal injury to a people; by the example it shews of the events of human actions, and by the objects it proposes, in this accidental way, for imitation. The expence and idleness a theatre occasions, have been most considered: but the people of *London* can afford the charge; and when a playhouse is well conducted, there are few places where they can better spend the hours of leisure: but if something more than this might not be done, the present article would have escaped consideration.

THESE are the benefits, and disadvantages, that may arise to the public from a theatre. Which of them the people shall receive

receive, and in what proportion, depends upon those who have their management: this therefore is an office of importance. The choice of plays, and the disposition of the audience in the most conspicuous places, will determine whether the stage shall be a nursery of vice, or school of virtue. This shews the subject under easy heads; the real damages, and the possible advantages; the present management, and what might be better.

C H A P. I.

Of the Mischiefs of the present Theatre.

WHEN plays are so selected as to flatter the follies, and encourage even the vices of a people, the theatre becomes a public mischief; and this will always be the case, when an interested person

person has the direction : for the multitude will go most frequently, where they are most flattered ; and the advantage of the proprietor, will be proportioned to the mischief, which he does the public.

SUCH plays, should be selected, as set in the most pleasing light those virtues, which are the opposite to the fashionable vices : but under the management of a private person, this will not be done ; because fewer, would go to them. Certainly, 'tis better to teach a few right, than to mislead multitudes : but the taste for plays is so high, that they would go to good ones, if there were no other.

THE result of these general thoughts, is not less obvious, than it is weighty : the regulation of the stage, should be in the power of some person not interested

in

in the profits of it. The morals of the people demand this care; and the advantages which may arise to the government, are no inconsiderable object; the proof will lie in a more particular detail: and the propriety, indeed to use the just phrase, the necessity of such a regulation, will rise in the same view.

INTRIGUE, dissimulation, and successful villany, are the great lessons of those comedies in which a people too much abandoned to licentiousness, and fraud, and falsehood, take most delight: therefore, the present practice selects these; and in that flattering glass of fair representation, shews them the gay and glossy outside of themselves, concealing all within. They came inclined to ill; they go away resolv'd; they are the persons most
tainted

tainted with their own vices thrive, and are respected: they laugh at themselves for being but half abandoned; and give up all to rapine, and to pleasure.

In tragedy, where patient virtue, and a manly resolution, should meet with their reward in happiness and honour, the innocent alone perish. 'Tis not that the writers of our country have left no others; but 'tis because these best please a people too much inclined to vice, and too little strengthened by that firm mind which was the character of their great ancestors. The others should be chosen; for tho' abundant wealth has brought in luxury, it only threatens us with an effeminacy of manners: we are not yet sunk into it. Honest tragedy would restore us to ourselves: our resolution, and our antique spirit are not

dead

dead, they only sicken; and this should be the medicine. Our sea officers have shewn that a years absence from this school of weakness hardens the *Briton*, and he is again a hero. The stage, so much frequented, offers us the medicine or the poison; but unless the interested conductors of the scenes, escape the mischief of those examples, which they give the public, two-pence a year advantage would make them deal out death instead of health.

In the lesser articles, particularly in the abominable disposition of an audience in the most conspicuous places, the present management is of the same ill character; and the same pernicious consequences will not fail to follow. The theatre shews before the young and unwary, prof-
titutes

titutes in real life ; just as it gives villains in the fictitious character ; it sets the gay outside full to the thoughtless view of those who are most likely to be influenced by the sight ; but does not, nor can shew them, what is concealed ; the tortured conscience, and the mangled constitution ; the hospital, neglect, and miserable infamy, which makes death mercy.

A mixture of various characters in the places of inferior price, cannot be easily avoided ; nor is the mischief half so great : for *they* sit undistinguished in the gallery, who attract every eye in the front of the boxes. These places were reserved for other purposes : they were the seats once of persons of family and fashion ; and these are yet the only places into which these can go. But with what
company

company are they now mixed, by the unpardonable fault of those who have the letting of the seats! 'Tis not by accident these women are let in, for places there are taken: but by the common prostitution of the house (the lesser officers following the example of their high leaders) these women have the best. A half crown gives at any time the preference. 'Tis possible the places may be taken in false names; but that fraud could not answer. Their servants have not the air of the domestics of people of fashion; nor are their own faces unknown to those who open the doors to them. 'Tis suffered, for it brings the men: and it will be always suffered, while the person who should prevent the indecency, gets the price of the full house,

WE

WE must be dead to honour and to shame, if we can look upon the consequences, without indignation. These creatures call off the attention of the men from the young women of honour; for modesty, tho' it can charm, does not allure like wanton invitation: and they delude continually the doating and weak men of distinction for there are such; age and folly are the lot of man; and they will claim their share among the highest. The delusion is equal in the other sex; and the effects shock us every day, tho' we do not perceive they are the consequences of this abuse. While the pretty wife of some industrious tradesman scorns to live with her humble husband, after she has seen less beauty glitter with the rewards of prostitution; the booby son of an honourable father, feels the same effect, tho' in a different

ferent manner. Infamy and beggary tread swift upon the heels of these unthinking resolutions: but they are not foreseen. To this ostentation of the advantages of prostitution; and these opportunities of their allurements, we owe half the abandoned wives, and disobedient children which break the best hearts that remain among us: to this we owe, much more than we are aware, the numbers of unmarried women of quality; and to this the disgraceful matches of men of the same rank. There is no other place where these women can display themselves, and their gaudy fortunes to so much advantage, or where they can mix so easily with the men; and what's more shameful, with the women of honour. 'Tis an offence to common decency to see a lady of reputation, perhaps with her daughters, whom
she

she has educated with a virtuous care,
 and whose chaste ears were never shock-
 ed with the brutality of a lascivious con-
 versation, placed on the same seat with
 one of these common creatures; and
 obliged to become confidants of all her
 assignations. At present, the lady, who
 shall find herself so situated, has no choice
 but to leave the place; and this is becom-
 ing a custom: but if our audiences had
 the old *Athenian* virtue, they would pre-
 vent these insults: the pit would take
 virtue, decency, and innocence into their
 protection; and rise with an universal hiss
 upon the entrance of one of these infam-
 ous women into those places. They
 ought to do this, for it is their own con-
 cern; their wives and daughters will be the
 sacrifices to the indulgence: and a fortune
 amassed by the honest industry of a life of
 care

care, will be squandered by a reprobate son in two or three years, upon such an object. It will be easy for the government to prevent this; nor is it beneath their notice. The king of *France* did not account such an offence to public decency beneath his reprehension. One of our women of this character had seated herself in the boxes; and she was told, by his order, "That was not a place for her."

If there were no other cause why the conduct of a theatre should be made a public concern, this alone were sufficient; but there is one of more immediate, tho' nothing can be of more important, consideration.

THE morals of the people might not only be improved by a disinterested regulation of the playhouses; but the government

ment also assisted: and there can be no period when this will be more necessary. The theatre has been disregarded by those who, in other times, had the care of public affairs; because the sums which it produced were trifling: but 'tis otherwise now; nor is there any reason or pretence why those who have the profits of it, should not contribute their share with others; of the public expence.

WE have been compelled into a war with a powerful enemy; and for a time the advantage was on the other side; 'tis now entirely on ours; and the unsuccessful enemy is reduced to the verge of ruin: we are reduced with her; tho' not so low: for advantages against so great a nation, are not obtained without expensive armaments. At present, *England* and *France* appear as two spent swimmers;

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and

and he that can keep a little longer above water, gains the victory. The advantage of carrying on the war in such a situation is evident; but the supplies required for it are vast: and, after what have been raised, there may be difficulty in obtaining more. The people shew an honourable readiness; but the will does not create the power. In such a critical time whatever can assist fairly and honestly should be called in; and plainly this is the condition of the theatres. No taxes are raised so easily, or paid so chearfully, as those upon the amusements of a people; and certainly to gain so large a supply, and at the same time to improve the source from whence it springs, is an object not unworthy the consideration of an honest statesman.

If

If there be any reason why those who amass fortunes by the management of a play-house should enjoy the distinguished privilege of going untaxed ; let those who know it, say what it is : to me the omission appears no other than an absolute oversight ; or a neglect of the subject, as unworthy regard, from its not being known, what was the produce.

ALL other ranks of people are taxed ; and they pay it chearfully ; places, and employments, tho' their salary be the real pay of duty and attendance, pay their proportion to the public charge : nay, the king's absolute bounty : pensions are not excepted ; nor do those desire it who receive them. Merchants, who raise our sailors ; tradesmen, who employ the industrious and honest poor, pay duties in their several articles : what reason can there

be these should escape, who do the nation no exemplary good ; and who employ only the idle, and often the abandoned?

THE least things are taxed among us ; why then should the greater escape ? The pamphlet I am writing, even while it points out the exemption of others, pays its share to the public ; and if we state the account fairly, this is not a small one.

THE paper will cost seventeen shillings and sixpence which makes two hundred and fifty ; for more cannot be expected to sell, as there is neither scandal, obscenity nor blasphemy, to recommend it : the printing will amount to one pound eleven shillings ; the advertising to five guineas ; and the duty to five shillings. The produce of the sale will be nine pounds : the publisher demands the rest, according to the rules

rules of trade. Of the money paid for the advertisements, two thirds goes to the public; and adding to this the duty, the whole tax upon it amounts to three pounds sixteen shillings; and there is still to be added also that on paper. Thus while I gain a guinea, for myself, I pay the government four. The king has four fifths of what I get by honest labour; and he is welcome. If the farther necessities of the state should demand half of the poor remainder, he shall have it, and God bless him: I'll write with a less candle; and drink his health in water.

THE mind is not to be commanded: therefore none can propose that another shall pay his proportion with this cheerfulness; but the state may demand that he pay it; and the gold will serve the soldiers, whether it comes by constrain

strait or freely. I would not venture to propose so large a share of any other's profits; nor would it be needful. Without exaggerating the accounts, or making an inordinate demand. One of the theatres, if I am not greatly deceived in my computation, may pay the government eleven thousand pounds a year, and there will yet be enough left of the produce to support the performers like gentlemen, and to place the capital ones among them upon a rank with those who must be allowed, by prejudice itself, their natural superiors.

FASHION, which fills one of the theatres at present, may also crowd the other; caprice is guided easily, and there are enough people who love pleasure. I have computed from the smallest house; therefore supposing the other to be but moderately successful

successful, there may be an addition of more than twenty thousand pound a year to the public revenue, nor is there any reason to exempt the summer diversions.

If the computation from the possible filling of a second house be treated as uncertain; the other is not hazardous: and any one who will count the number of plays in a year, and take the general receipt of the house, will find whether I have err'd; or have endeavoured, or intended, to exaggerate the sum.

THE produce of one theatre will thus, on the most moderate account, double the sum raised by the late additional charge upon advertisements; which tho' it was found necessary, I am told was considered as a discouragement to trade; and ordered with much reluctance.

NONE

None will suffer here, except those who have the present management; nor should this properly be called suffering. The place is held by patent; which he who gave it, may at pleasure recall: it has been overlooked too long already; and the just consideration would be, not that the inordinate advantage ceases, but that it was so long enjoyed with this most strange indemnity.

The regulation, if it should take place, would appear hard to one man of great merit in his profession: but so do many things at first; and so does every tax to honest men who pay it: the necessity and the propriety of such a measure should answer all such objections.

I shall allow readily that the merit of this, one person has in a great measure raised the theatre to its present importance: and that
it

it would be hard he should be hurt; but now the general taste for these representations is established, the loss of him would not reduce the profits; nor is what is here proposed to be call'd an injury. It may be possible, by a peculiar management to make one performer seem all in all important; but such a management is neither natural, nor wise. We have seen the slightest things take their turn with those consider'd as most meritorious, and Harlequin has crowded as many seats, and for as many nights, as Richard. This might be done always, by an active vigilant, and disinterested person in the management; and all the good would follow. As to the private interests of any particular person, they might be enough consider'd, tho' the abundant profits were not indulg'd. I think merit even in the most

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frivolous

frivolous things, should be encouraged and rewarded among a polite and judicious people: but there are bounds which all wise states will set, distinguishing useful from amusing talents; the honourable from the idle: or if with us an extream indulgence sets these very unequal objects on an equality, there surely cannot be need of an exemption from public taxations in favour of the least important.

As the money got by the management of a theatre, is gain'd under a patent from the king, there can be no doubt of the propriety of such a taxation as should yet allow sufficient encouragement and reward to those who acted under it; nor can any thing be more truly or naturally the property of the public, than what is obtain'd under a privilege granted by the sovereign. For the rest, it is not easy

easy to conceive any actor will appear, who can suppose he deserves more pay than an admiral of our fleets, or general of our armies. 'Tis evident, that two or three of the capital performers, might receive salaries equal to these; and the inferior classes be at least as well paid as they are now; and yet the full saving here mention'd, might be made for the government.

'Tis hard to say, how high a vain man in this romantic cast of life, may rate his own perfections: yet, it is scarce to be conceiv'd, that any except himself will place him above those, who in more happy ages honoured Britain by their genius; NEWTON or LOCKE for instance. The master of the mint was suppos'd an honourable recompense for the first of these, and the other was not less sensible of the fa-

vour of his country, when he sat down at the board of trade. In reason, the like appointments should something more than satisfy a player; but we do not limit the sum so closely. The public will pay more for amusement than instruction; and this sets a kind of value on their abilities who give it. Something more, indeed a great deal more than this may be allowed, if others think it necessary; but if we gave to the present capital performer, a sum equal to that which in the hands of Lewis the fourteenth, pension'd all the eminent men of Europe, the surplus of this, and all other expences of a theatre, would still give the government at least a sum equal to what has been named in the first computation,

The player has ambition as well as avarice; and that cannot demand more incense

cense than has been offer'd to it in the pre-
 sent time, wheresoever it has been found.
 The public never fail to give applause
 equal to the merit: and we have a strong in-
 stance at this time, that they will continue the
 tribute even when there are no longer those
 excellences in the person which first demand-
 ed it. Where they have prais'd the sweet-
 ness of a voice, they will shut their ears
 to the defect, when it is lost, and repeat
 their applause; or if the merit lay ori-
 ginally in a spirited and easy gesture, they
 will applau'd the person, even when it
 has degenerated into convulsions. The
 public will by this generous conduct, al-
 ways keep up a spirit of excelling a-
 mong the performers.

What I would propose for the regulation
 of the theatres, is this.

That

THAT the conduct of its entertainments, be for the future taken under the care of the government; and a person of judgment and integrity appointed by the name of controller, or conductor of the stage; or with some other such title, who alone shall determine what old plays shall be acted, and what new ones shall be received: and who shall take charge of the money received, and defray the necessary expences; accounting for the remainder to the public. As this will be an office of trust, it will require a good salary; but it should be granted for no term; only during a proper behaviour.

THE advantages that would arise from this, are evident in regard to the real utility of the theatres; which being more frequented than churches, and delivering their instruction with less gravity, will become

come highly beneficial to the morals of the people; nor can there remain a doubt of the service it would do the public by the clear product, which to a degree,

It cannot appear strange, unreasonable, or oppressive, that the government should take into its own hands, the right of these entertainments; since the present practice understands, and shows that the property lies originally there. The exhibitions under other hands are merely tolerated; the employing a company of players is by permission of the court; their performances are under the restraint of the high office of lord Chamberlain; and the property of the stage is held by patent.

AMONG the uses of a theatre, the assisting our public charities by a nights profit is not the least: and tho' the price which is exacted for the house on these occasions,

fions, is such as allows a very considerable gain to the proprietors, yet the humanity of the public, never fails to fill them to a degree, which highly answers the good purpose. The number of nights granted to these services, would be increased, when the government had the property of the theatres; nor should we see when one of the two houses was open'd for this purpose, the other proposing its most favourite performances to draw the fickle company away from it. There is a contradiction in these things as they are manag'd at present, altogether unaccountable. We see the same person, in the same season, promoting one laudable charity by a benefit, granted at his own theatre; and opposing with all his power, the success of another, equally laudable, when a benefit has been granted at the other house. Humanity would have been shock'd to see the

the BUSY BODY, and the WONDER, oppos'd to the MIDDLESEX-HOSPITAL, and the MUSICIANS CHARITY; had we not seen them play'd to empty benches.

When private interest has no share in the appointment of plays for particular nights, we shall not see one of the theatres, thus kept in a forced opposition to the other: but this is not all, there is a great deal of artifice used, where very little appears; and by such devices, more than from superior desert, one of the houses is crowded always, and the other thin. It would have the appearance of personal calumny, were I to enter into the particulars of this artful conduct: 'tis enough that it is known; and there is no need to trace it further; since, if ever private views cease, by the theatres coming within the direction of the government, these mischiefs will be at an end of course:

public

public designs will be assisted by benefits easily obtained, and advantageously conducted; the people who crowd to them for entertainment, will receive with it instruction; the amusements and extravagancies of the public will be assu'd; instead of their labours and necessities; the humane will be rejoiced to see a Tax which cannot affect the poor; and the government will receive from this source, even while no addition is made to the price, more then it does from some of lamented necessity.

F I N I S.



Errata. Page 14, line the last, for *are* read *see*.
Page 35, line the last, for *theatrus* read *theatra*.

